

# Literacy Audit

March 27, 2009

Maine Township High School District 207

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# MAINE TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 207

## Literacy Audit

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**MAINE TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 207**  
**Literacy Audit**  
**March 2009**

**Method for Conducting the Audit**

In fall of 2008, administrators from Maine Township District 207 identified the need to carefully scrutinize the effects that professional development efforts have had on literacy instruction practices across the curriculum. Several administrators screened possible consultants and selected a team of three consultants to conduct the audit. The auditors have experience in literacy instruction at the university level and experience with school level and district level administration, including responsibilities for delivering staff development. Our credentials appear in greater detail in Appendix A.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Before our on-site visit, we examined and discussed several documents provided by the leadership at the district level and at each of the two campuses. We examined PSAT data, school improvement plans, the district improvement plan, and school report cards. These documents revealed information about student demographics, about achievement levels and gaps, and about areas of emphasis for improvement. In addition, we studied the lists of core readings for English classes and for the summer reading programs. The printed materials offered a preview of the Maine High School District and about the strategies to affect improvements in achievement in areas of literacy.

As part of our planning before the on-site visits, we constructed a standard set of probes for the interviews with teachers and with students, and identified a framework to focus classroom observations. See Appendixes B through D for the specific probes and for the observation framework.

Each of the three consultants spent a day at each of the two high schools involved in the study. We collected data through 61 classroom visits, interviews with 35 teachers, forums with groups of students at all grade levels, and conversations with school administrators. We took extensive field notes during each occasion and shared the notes with each other to discover patterns and common observations.

We devoted the better part of the last day of our visit to affirming our shared conclusions and to identifying the organization of the main sections of the report, and to beginning the construction of the report. We also had an opportunity to share preliminary findings with a team of administrators.

**Limitations**

We acknowledge that there are several limitations to our study:

- While we made 61 classroom visits, each visit was less than 30 minutes in length, and our limited observation of each class may not offer a representative view of usual practices.
- We made some classroom visits on a “collaboration day,” when students followed an abbreviated schedule of classes. The shortened classes may not have offered the most representative views of typical classroom practices.
- While we interviewed 35 teachers from two high schools, their views may not be representative of the teaching faculty as a whole.
- While we interviewed 47 students, representing all grades and a variety of ability levels, their views might not be representative of the student body as a whole.
- While we did hear reports from administrators and teachers about the recent professional development activities related to literacy instruction, we may not have been exposed to the entire wealth of literacy-related professional development at each campus.

## Findings

The primary focus of our study was to find evidence that in classrooms across the curriculum, teachers were putting into practice the literacy instruction strategies that had been endorsed in district-sponsored professional development activities. In classroom visits we looked for examples of explicit literacy instruction. When we could identify examples, we attempted to connect them to the literacy instruction workshops provided by the district. In interviews with teachers and students, we probed about their awareness of the teaching of literacy strategies and about the source for learning those strategies.

### 1. Strengths

Our visit to Maine High School District 207 revealed many of its strengths. The leaders at the district level and at the individual schools took the initiative to invite an audit that would take an objective look at current literacy instruction practices. At every step in the process, the school leaders accommodated our requests for information and for managerial support to facilitate the inquiry.

In our visits to the East and the West campuses, we met teachers who were committed to providing meaningful instruction for all of their students. Teachers came to class well prepared and revealed through their interactions with students that they had developed a positive rapport with them. Students not only participated cooperatively with us through interviews, but they worked cooperatively and respectfully with teachers in the classrooms that we visited.

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Class sizes in the classrooms we visited were relatively small. The largest class had 24 students. The small class sizes offer a distinct advantage when teachers face challenges to differentiate instruction to foster academic success for all students.

Students and teachers have easy access to technology. We saw LCD projectors in most classrooms, which many teachers used to support presentations. We saw students using computers in classrooms, in labs, and in the learning resource centers. In a few classrooms, we witnessed students researching online, composing presentations, and word processing.

The students we interviewed expressed pride in their school and appreciation for their teachers. Students and teachers affirmed that they valued the diversity represented by the student body at each campus.

## ***2. Understanding Literacy and Literacy Strategies***

Teachers at both Maine East and West possess a basic concept of literacy as having something to do with the ability to read a variety of texts with fluency and comprehension. Some expand this definition to include being able to write for various audiences and purposes, while others focus more on the ability to read a range of types of texts, including technical writing, electronic texts, and visual images. Most see literacy strategies as skills students can use to comprehend and evaluate texts, while a few expand this definition to include skills students can use to find information after determining what they do not know. When asked to identify specific literacy strategies, most teachers are able to mention one or two specific reading strategies such as previewing or annotating a text.

Students do not use the terms *literacy* or *literacy strategies*, of course, but the students we spoke with all recognize that being skilled readers, writers, and speakers will be “useful throughout life,” will make them “sound educated,” enable them to “put sentences together that make sense” and “take the ACT.” In short, they understand at some level that skilled language users have social capital that less skilled individuals lack and that this capital can enable them to go to college or gain future employment. What none of the students articulated, however, is the idea that becoming skillful readers, writers, and speakers can help them become more successful thinkers and students. Most students also make a clear distinction between the kinds of reading and writing they do in school and the literacy activities they participate in outside of school. They seem genuinely surprised that activities such as text messaging, blogging, game playing, and enjoying graphic novels and magazines such as *Seventeen* can be called real reading and writing. Most students also report that school assignments seldom give them the opportunity to read or write about topics that they care deeply about. Those who had experienced choice, especially in writing topics, spoke enthusiastically about the

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experience. Those who were given a significant range of choices in required summer reading were more likely to have found the experience to be meaningful or pleasurable than were students who read a canonical text and wrote a required paper about it over the summer.

Although neither faculty nor students directly acknowledge the continuum of literacy skills that exist within individual students nor the possibilities for connecting school and out-of-school literacy practices, both groups seem open to the idea that a variety of literacies exists.

### Concerns

Teachers are not always able to translate general literacy strategies into strategies they see as being helpful in their specific disciplines. For this reason, many students experience the application of literacy strategies as something they are required to do only at specific times or in certain classes. They are not aware that this kind of knowledge is transferable and useful when not explicitly required.

In addition, teachers sometimes see literacy instruction primarily in terms of things they can do to make texts easier for students. Rather than modeling and inviting students to use literacy strategies, they provide environments in which students can avoid using the strategies they need to internalize in order to become progressively more sophisticated readers and writers. This approach makes the acquisition of content knowledge easier for students, but limits opportunities for meaningful literacy practice. Finally, because students see reading, writing, and speaking as skills they will need “some day,” they fail to see that increased literacy has immediate value for them within the school environment. They also are unaware that literacy practices they have acquired outside of school can have value as they work to develop academic literacy.

### Recommendations

- If teachers deepen their concept of literacy to encompass “the intersection of people, texts, modes, practices and the varied meanings of literacy learning in different situations and cultural contexts” (Avermann and McLean, 2007), they can begin to explore ways to connect students’ out-of-school literacy experiences to the academic literacies they wish to foster. They will be able to base their instruction more effectively on students’ interests and abilities and involve students more fully as active participants in their own development as readers, writers, speakers, and thinkers. Because students’ active involvement in their own literacy development depends greatly on opportunities to choose and develop writing topics and to select at least some reading material that they can easily connect to their out-of-school lives, teachers will need to begin to build appropriate choices into the reading, writing, and speaking assignments they give their students (National Writing Project and Nagin, 2006; Tovani, 2004).

- Students need to see literacy strategies as practices that are useful for everyone, not just for freshmen or for struggling readers and writers. All teachers should become comfortable with regularly modeling and articulating the strategies they themselves use as they read and write about texts in their disciplines. As reading specialist Chris Tovani (2004) points out, “Oftentimes we construct meaning without even being aware of doing so. We negotiate familiar text so automatically that we forget what it was like for us before we became expert readers” (p. 31). Students need to see how specific strategies can be adapted and applied by skilled readers of specific kinds of texts before they can come to believe that they, too, can become increasingly competent readers and writers (Monahan, 2008; Beers, 2003; Smith & Wilhelm, 2006; Wilhelm, Baker & Dube, 2001).
- All teachers also should begin to think about literacy instruction as sequences of lessons designed to help students become progressively more independent. A graphic organizer, for example, can be an excellent scaffold, but it should be viewed as a temporary support students can use until they understand the thinking skills that the scaffold encourages. Rather than following the scaffolded lesson with another reading or writing task using a different graphic organizer, it would be better to create a second lesson in which students are asked to do a similar kind of thinking and are allowed to create and use a similar graphic organizer if they wish. Eventually students should be able to complete similar tasks without the external scaffold. Because reading and writing development is so closely connected, students should be using writing to solve problems and record thinking in all of their classes. An extensive body of research documents the value of writing across the curriculum as a powerful learning tool (Anson & Beach, 1995; Mayher, Lester & Pradl, 1983; Strong, 2006), but it is one that is not yet fully employed at Maine East and West. Perhaps by shifting their focus from teaching individual literacy strategies to helping students become “strategic readers and writers in authentic contexts” (Beach & O’Brian, 2007, p. 220), teachers can become more effective in helping students develop life-long literacy practices.

### ***3. Staff Development***

In our interviews with teachers, they were able to note two levels of staff development related to literacy instruction. Many teachers recalled that an element of new teacher induction was a workshop on teaching literacy strategies. On another level, teachers were aware of optional literacy instruction workshops sponsored by the district. The more veteran teachers did not recall a literacy instruction workshop as part of their new teacher training. They knew that they had the option to select literacy workshops to extend their professional development, but seldom did teachers choose to participate in the workshops if they did not appear to have a clear connection to teaching the content of their discipline.

### Concern

If the school district had invested significant time and resources into preparing teachers to deliver literacy instruction across the curriculum, we saw little evidence that teachers were putting the training into practice. In more than 60 classroom observations, we

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observed four instances of explicit literacy instruction. While we saw examples of literacy events (i.e., reading, writing, vocabulary study) in almost every class we visited, we observed few occasions when teachers were explicitly teaching literacy strategies. This observation should not be too surprising, however, since there is often a gap between intended policy and classroom practice, especially in large schools and in schools that have not incorporated extensive teacher collaboration in creating policy (Franzak, 2008).

At the same time, students described in detail the many extensive reading and writing tasks they were expected to complete, and they noted examples of the efforts that teachers made to prepare them for this reading and writing. Teachers also described a variety of literacies, including the interpretation of data and visual images, and they offered examples of how they helped students to develop these literacies.

At the West campus, we saw evidence that a professional development initiative from several years ago continues to influence instruction in written composition. In interviews, students referred to expectations for the development of expository or persuasive prose built on Stephen Toulmin's (1958, 1997) model for informal reasoning. Students agreed that consistent among teachers in different subjects was the expectation that in their writing, students would support general claims with evidence and interpret the evidence with the use of warrants. Students actually used the term *warrants*. During one classroom visit, a teacher shared a handout that provided students with a template that prompted the use of the basic features of the Toulmin model. At the East campus, we saw something similar in that some teachers offered students a template to prompt some elements of reasoning, but the labels and structure were not consistent with the Toulmin model.

While the Toulmin model example offers some hope that a consistent and aggressive staff development initiative can take hold, the effort seems to have served one campus alone, and there are now a variety of related but inconsistent attempts to prompt students to generate elaborated texts through reasoned thought.

### Recommendations

- Provide a highly focused and extended staff development program that emphasizes literacy instruction. The program would offer a one- to two-year plan of activities for new teacher induction, institute days, school improvement days,



collaboration time, and summer opportunities. The program should have an overarching theme to support a conceptual unity that will reveal to staff the goals for the district and the expectations for their participation and growth.

- A needs assessment among faculty should inform the staff development plan, probing for perceptions about knowledge about literacies, differentiation, assessment, pedagogical variety, and Response to Intervention.
- A staff development program that emphasizes literacy instruction should differentiate for teachers in the variety of disciplines in the school. For example, math teachers are eager to learn about strategies for helping students to read the kind of material that is important in mathematics: e.g., data sets, graphs, diagrams, functions and equations. Teachers understand that writing about the concepts in the discipline will promote deep understanding of those concepts, but teachers would benefit from knowing more about how to prepare students to complete the writing in a way that meets standards for the discipline. To plan the differentiation in staff development instruction, planners would need to confer with subject area experts and compile a variety of examples that serve as models for practice.
- When teachers select from professional development options, they select the choices that appear to have the most obvious connection to their discipline. In offering professional development options for literacy instruction, planners should offer workshops as specific as “Teaching Reading in the Sciences” or “Writing for Understanding in Mathematics.”

#### 4. *Classroom Discourse*

The dominant type of classroom discourse defines the nature of the learning experience in the classroom. Research (e.g., Nystrand, 1997, 2006; Cristoph & Nystrand, 2001; Applebee, Langer, and Nystrand, 2003) reveals that frequent participation in “authentic discussion” ties to higher levels of student achievement on measures of reading and writing performance. We view learning as an essentially social activity, and we recognize the crucial role that purposeful peer interaction plays in developing language, in interpreting texts, in preparing for written composition, and in thinking critically.

##### Concern

While we saw examples of well prepared teachers who worked in purposeful ways to deliver goal-oriented instruction to students, most of the classroom instruction we observed was teacher-dominated, with very little purposeful peer interaction. The most common mode of instruction that we observed was *presentational* or *frontal*, as Goodlad (2004) calls it. When students did participate, they offered brief responses to the teacher’s questions. When we did witness student participation, it was most often *recitation*. As opposed to *authentic discussion*, *recitation* requires students to produce responses to questions that have pre-specified answers. During recitation, few students participate, and the contributions seldom extend beyond one-word or one-sentence responses. The following exchange, taken from a class at the East campus, illustrates the idea of *recitation*:

Teacher: "When King Louis escaped, where did he go?"

Student: "England."

Teacher: "No."

Student: "Germany."

Teacher: "No. Think about Marie Antoinette."

Student: "Austria."

Teacher: "Austria. Will this make things better or worse for Louis?"

Student: "Worse."

Teacher: "Worse."

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*At both schools, among various classes, we witnessed the common pattern of the teacher prompting students to recite pre-specified answers, the teacher offering positive verbal reinforcement for correct answers, and the teacher offering the elaboration and analysis.*

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The following typical questions prompted the recitation of pre-specified answers: "Revolutions are usually started by what?" "French society was organized into three what?" Although we draw this example from a class at the East campus, we could point to similar examples at Maine West. A teacher's search for the simple recall of information reduces classroom discourse to memory tasks and discourages analysis and critical assessment. At both schools, among various classes, we witnessed the common pattern of the teacher prompting students to recite pre-specified answers, the teacher offering positive verbal reinforcement for correct answers, and the teacher offering the elaboration and analysis. The District 207 Strategic Plan affirms that "All students will develop the habits necessary to conduct research, engage in problem solving, and make informed decisions through experience, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation." It is difficult to imagine realizing this goal when classroom discourse is dominated by recitation.

Several authorities in the field of literacy learning, emphasize the importance of oral discourse in the process of writing and in support of reading for meaning. Several authorities (Nystrand, 1997, 2006; Cazden, 2001; Smith and Wilhelm, 2002, 2006; Hillocks, 1995, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2007; Smagorinsky and Fly, 1993, 1994; Langer, 2001; and Applebee, 1996, 1999) reveal in their research that authentic discussion supports students in the process of expanding vocabulary and in developing elaborated responses to writing tasks. Authentic discussion also supports students' in their efforts to synthesize their reading and to assess critically the ideas that they derive from texts. In addition, Freeman, Freeman, and Mercuri (2002, 2003) encourage teachers to engage English language learners in collaborative activities and to scaffold instruction to build on students' academic language proficiency.

### Recommendations

- Staff development should include attention to shifting the nature and quality of classroom discourse toward *authentic discussion* and away from *recitation*. In many ways, this effort requires rethinking what is important to learn and how adolescents learn. See, for example, Copeland (2005) and McCann, Johannessen, Kahn & Flanagan (2006) for specific suggestions.
- Staff development on literacy instruction should emphasize the role that purposeful peer interaction plays in the process of writing and in the processes of preparation for reading and reflection about reading.
- While the facilitation of discussion may appear intuitive and easy, it is a skill that demands preparation and practice. Collaboration with peers will support efforts to plan for authentic discussion, and classroom observations by peers and supervisors can support efforts to refine practice.
- A discussion-based classroom aligns closely with cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and inquiry-based learning. Any professional development efforts to promote an inquiry mode of instruction should attend to preparing teachers to plan and manage small group discussion, to facilitate large group discussion, and to sequence the strategic combination of small group and large group discussion.

### **5. Diversity of Instructional Strategies**

The work of Howard Gardner (1993), Vera John-Steiner (1997), and Elliot Eisner (1997, 2002) reminds us that there are great differences in the ways learners approach the world. While it is not always possible to attend to everyone's preferred mode of learning during each lesson, it is helpful to vary the instructional approaches across a set of lessons so that teachers attend to the needs of all learners. But beyond just thinking about the way people learn, there has been a longstanding reconsideration of just what exactly do we want to teach. In an age of rapidly developing communication, is it really necessary to keep asking students to memorize facts? Should the emphasis be switched from being devoted to bits of information to being devoted to the process of thinking, learning, and communicating about the world? And shouldn't such a classroom be centered around inquiry? Classrooms that host inquiry and attend to students' various preferred learning modalities would have to include a variety of learning experiences, especially scaffolded experiences that lead to higher order thinking.

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*Advances in pedagogy reveal an appreciation that different learners have different dominant learning modalities.*

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### Concern

We observed a striking consistency of teacher-led, fact-level learning strategies. The consistency would be more impressive if we had witnessed a consistent approach to instruction that challenged students to analyze and evaluate. Out of 61 lessons observed,

we did not see a single example of cooperative learning, and only two examples of small-group work, and those two small groups were working on filling out a worksheet together, not really an example of a cooperative learning activity. If teachers have had professional development in cooperative learning, we did not see evidence of that. Lessons were almost uniformly teacher-led. This kind of teaching leads students into a paradigm in which their goal is to provide the right answer at the right time and the right place, which narrowly defines the mission of schools. It was obvious that a great deal of effort had been put into constructing these teacher-led lessons, but there was little evidence of the teachers' stepping back from the facts and asking the students, "OK, but why are we doing this?" "Why is it important for us to be thinking about this?" "What questions do you have about this topic?"

Again, the district's strategic plan sets a goal that "All students will develop the habits necessary to conduct research, engage in problem solving, and make informed decisions through experience, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation." It is hard to imagine how this goal can be accomplished without a shift away from presentations as the dominant mode of instruction and a shift away from simple recall of information as the end goal for learning.

### Recommendations

- As part of the classroom observation protocol and the related reflective conversations, principals and other evaluators should ask to see at least one higher-level thinking activity represented in the lessons they observe. The district's Professional Staff Evaluation Plan, which apparently is based on the Charlotte Danielson (2007) model, expresses the expectation that "The teacher uses a variety of instructional strategies that meet the needs of diverse learners and result in effective student learning."
- A concerted effort should be underway to provide examples of model lessons and alternative strategies that include differentiation of instruction and some higher order thinking tasks.
- This staff development should focus on looking at examples of model classroom differentiation (see Appendix F for resources).
- Examples of standardized tests should be examined and compared to the typical worksheet kind of activity.
- There will also need to be an extensive communication strategy for explaining to students (and parents) about a paradigm shift toward an inquiry-based instruction. Students have been so acculturated into the way we "do school," that they may resist a classroom shift that emphasizes inquiry into open-ended questions. Rather than constantly having to wonder "What do I have to do to get an A?" students should rather be learning how to inquire about their world. This is a significant change and needs to be accompanied by a communication plan for both students and parents.

## 6. Response to Intervention

All schools in Illinois will implement the Response to Intervention model by fall of 2010. That does not mean that RTI will be fully implemented from the very beginning of the school year. Typically, schools have preceded implementation with presentations and discussions among faculties to introduce the RTI model and to help staff to prepare for their individual roles in the process. Beyond the legal obligation to implement RTI, there is the reasonable promise that following the model will provide students with the help that they need, when they need it. The model implies that teachers will not allow academic failure, not by lowering standards, but by providing the appropriate interventions to support students' learning at high levels.

### Concern

While we did not proceed with the intention of probing teachers about RTI, the topic came up during interviews. Teachers reported having a vague knowledge about RTI, and shared that they understood that the district had some plans for its implementation. The concern is that with the approach of the implementation of RTI, teachers do not have a deeper understanding about the model.

The concern is a critical one when the model offers great potential to take advantage of protected collaborative time, and the model promises to promote and accelerate the learning of all students. The model emphasizes early intervention and elevates the importance of literacy learning, which affects academic performance generally.

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### Recommendations

- Each school should contribute to an aggressive campaign to build the knowledge about RTI among all staff. The communication effort should include online access to resources. As a beginning step, teachers will want to know what RTI is, and what RTI obliges them to do in day-to-day practice. See Appendix H for some basic resources about RTI.
- Each school should have in place a strategic assessment system that includes baseline assessments for reading and writing, common formative assessments to track student progress and measure the effects of instruction, and a means for frequent progress monitoring for those students receiving aggressive interventions. It may take several years to develop a satisfactory assessment system. It would be reasonable to expect that a staff could adopt a reading screener soon and develop a writing assessment. While the middle schools in the area are using NWEA's Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), the results from those assessments can serve as predictors for performance on PSAT. Used in conjunction with other data, including teachers' observations, the MAP results

could help to identify students for a summer academy and for targeted interventions as students enter ninth grade.

- Over time, teachers should develop a repertoire of interventions to support literacy learning. In high school, the range of needs is wide. Some students with special needs will benefit from a variety of interventions that help them to decode and process information on the most rudimentary level. Many students will benefit from interventions that build their store of vocabulary. All students will benefit from interventions that promote reading and writing fluency. All students will benefit from interventions that support comprehension on multiple levels. The interventions should match student needs, and include attention to reading proficiencies beyond basic recall of information.
- Collaboration time should be used often as the vehicle for team problem solving. The problem solving process should be supported by access to current data about student achievement. Consistent, district-wide professional development about problem solving processes should support the work of collaborative teams.
- Since RTI is a systemic model, it is possible to subsume other themes and recommendations of this report under the RTI initiative.

## **7. Differentiation of Instruction**

Most Maine West and Maine East teachers understand *differentiation* as something they do when they prepare to teach different classes. For instance, they teach fourth period differently than they do sixth period because each group seems to respond differently to course content or methodology even though the students are theoretically at the same level. They differentiate between freshmen and upper division students, seeing a need for explicit literacy instruction for freshmen but not for advanced students; and they differentiate instruction for classes designated for low achieving or high achieving students, often basing this instruction on different outcome expectations. In general, however, they do not plan for differentiation within individual classes nor do they plan for advanced literacy instruction for high achieving students.

### Concerns

Because teachers see differentiation primarily in terms of classroom-sized groups of students, most are not looking for opportunities to differentiate within a single class period, even when the class may contain students who are fluent speakers of English but who struggle with academic reading and writing tasks or students who struggle with required reading or writing for other cultural, social, cognitive, or linguistic reasons (Fu, 1995; Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Rubinstein-Avila, 2004; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Tatum, 2007). In addition, assuming that advanced students do not need literacy instruction may prevent teachers from seeing that not all students in an advanced class are equally as successful in using appropriate literacy strategies. If teachers do not question students about how they are learning, teachers may not be aware of literacy gaps. Many successful students are very skilled at avoiding challenging reading tasks: They listen and repeat ideas articulated in class or rely on more skilled classmates or commercial text

substitutes such as Spark Notes for necessary information about texts. High achieving students at both Maine East and West report having used these aids as alternatives to reading a difficult or unappealing text. Finally, when self-monitoring of literacy strategies is not encouraged in all classes, students may fail to recognize that literacy development is a life-long task and that it is relevant to all academic endeavors.

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### Recommendations

- Literacy instruction or conversations about the reading and writing processes students are using to make meaning needs to be a regular part of every classroom experience. All teachers would do well to follow Pat Monahan's advice and "do something in class every day to activate reading" (2008, p. 101). Literacy lessons need not be long. Such lessons may constitute the bulk of the instruction in an ESL class, of course, and only require five minutes at some point in an AP senior level class, but teachers should not assume that advanced students have acquired all the literacy practices they need or that students are willing or able to practice appropriate strategies voluntarily. In fact, all students need to be coached into using the most effective reading strategy of all—intentional, focused re-reading. With practice, teachers should become comfortable verbalizing the strategies they use when they encounter challenging reading and writing tasks themselves (Beers, 2003). For instance, simply saying, "I found this section really confusing the first time I read it because I couldn't figure out what the author meant by X. Did anyone else have that problem?" models the fact that even very skilled readers encounter difficulties. It can then lead into a quick exchange of strategy ideas, reminding students of strategies they may have forgotten to apply or providing new ones they can add to their repertoires. Watching a teacher draft and revise a piece of writing in class also helps students understand literacy strategies that otherwise may remain largely a mystery (Hillocks, 2007). Teachers also can gradually build students' academic vocabularies by acknowledging student contributions and restating their ideas in more academic terms (Wolfe, 2004).
- If students avoid all challenging texts, they will not become stronger readers, so teachers who have chosen to create reading packets for students who struggle with a difficult textbook should be encouraged to provide a weekly reading lesson with a selected portion of the textbook or other difficult short piece of content-rich material. Whenever possible, this lesson should incorporate writing as well.
- Finally, all teachers should be sensitive to and plan for cultural, social, motivational, cognitive, and linguistic diversity within each class they teach. They should be encouraged to identify individuals or small groups of students within each class who need additional or a different kind of assistance with literacy tasks. This assistance may include offering students reading and writing choices that

reflect student interests or cultural backgrounds or providing extended time and scaffolding (King-Shaver & Hunter, 2003). Providing effective differentiation will also include providing all students will regular opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations about significant issues and concepts.

### **8. *Literacy Choices in English Classes***

There is a long tradition, dating back from the Committee of 10 in the 1890s of mandating a certain list of canonical texts to be featured in the English classroom. This initial desire was based on a still-prevalent belief that having read some core texts was part of the preparation for college. In recent years, however, there has been a shift in thinking in higher education that may not have been realized in certain high schools. If anything, we have a growing gap between United States high school curricula and college expectations. According to recent reports, colleges are looking for students to have developed certain “habits of mind” rather than to have memorized certain facts or have encountered plots of certain “great books” (see EPIC’s “Redefining College Readiness;” the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills; and the ACT College Readiness Standards, links in Appendix F).

At the same time we continue to stretch our conception of what good pedagogy is, there is a growing sense of confusion, especially in a new media age, of just what the literary canon should consist of today. Should Shakespeare still be at the forefront of the English classroom? Should we broaden our canon to include the works of such authors as Toni Morrison and Junot Diaz? Such changes in the reading lists at the college level makes it less defensible for high school teachers to insist upon reading a list of pre-determined “classics” that must be gotten through, almost as a rite of passage.

Forcing students to read an “approved list” also flies in the face of everything we know about the way humans read—that choice is a key motivator and liberator of reading abilities. So not only is altering the “canon” desirable by college readiness standards, it may be necessary to avoid derailing the literacy lives of our teens.

#### Concern

There was very little choice evident in the English/Language Arts classrooms in the high schools observed. While there were pockets of literature circles apparently being attempted (although none observed in the two days we were present), the main focus of the English classrooms, particularly at the ninth and tenth grade classrooms seemed to be getting through the “core texts,” such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Of Mice and Men*. There is nothing wrong with assigning Shakespeare, but one has to question whether every single ninth grader needs to read the exact same texts at the exact same time. And the process of getting through these texts seemed to involve a high degree of recitation, which is addressed in another section of this report. Ultimately, the reading lists that were provided to us contained few texts at each grade level.



If it is seen as necessary to have common district-wide assessments, perhaps these assessments could be made to be less about core texts and more about the processes of reading and writing (and doing history, science and math), with such assessments being more about asking students to be able to recognize effective rhetorical strategies, for example, or being able to tell the difference between primary and secondary sources. For instance, ideas that can be used to assess students' application of reading processes while reading literature can be found in Claggett (1996). In the Academy configuration observed at Main West, the social studies teacher and reading teacher were focusing on texts related to China while the English teacher was covering *Romeo and Juliet*. Similarly, it was also witnessed at Main East that struggling readers were indeed struggling through *Romeo and Juliet* and one has to wonder: why is this necessary? How are all of our students served by forcing the assignment of certain texts to all of them in a lock-step fashion?

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*If it is seen as necessary to have common district-wide assessments, perhaps these assessments could be made to be less about core texts and more about the processes of reading and writing.*

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### Recommendations

- The English Departments at all three high schools as well as the English Departments at the middle schools need to undertake a strategic planning process that will focus on setting goals for the literacy lives of the students of Maine schools. Such a strategic plan would focus on a key question: what do we want for the literacy lives of our students?
- Such a strategic planning process would include the setting up of study groups across schools. If it is impossible to set up face-to-face meetings, a Ning (social networking tool) could be set up to facilitate discussion of the key issues.
- These study groups would first immerse themselves in the current literature in the field of English/Language arts, including not only texts focusing on college readiness, but also texts that provide models of classroom organization for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Several classic models of the organization of literacy classrooms exist including Atwell's *In the Middle* (1998); Burke's *Reading Reminders* (2000); and Wilhelm's *You Gotta BE the Book* (1997).
- Out of this strategic planning process, a common menu of texts (including screen-based texts) would likely be generated that would be perhaps thematically based, so that teachers and students have some choices when thinking about the texts that will be assigned. Another product that would likely come out of this process would be a menu of a wider variety of texts: non-fiction, popular cultural texts, and electronic texts of various kinds among them. We encourage the departments

to pay special attention to contemporary texts and texts written by people of color and Latinos.

- There should be some consideration for placing all high school students on some kind of individualized (self-selected) reading program.
- Summer Reading should be re-conceptualized so that it is a meaningful activity for students and that offers some choices.

## 9. Technology

It certainly can't be overstated how technology continues to revolutionize our world in so many ways. We are essentially transitioning from an exclusively page-based communication society to a combination of page-based and screen-based society, and we are in the very first years of this transition (Kress, 2003). Calls for a broadened conception of literacy have years ago been legitimized by the professional organizations (Commission on Adolescent Literacy, 1999; NCTE/IRA, 1996, Appendix E). Even though we will probably always have books and the need to give learners experiences with books, we will also need to give students practice at reading and writing online. One might say that we are in an era comparable to "silent film" era in comparison with the modern filmmaking of today. It is clear that we are only just now beginning to master uses of new media ourselves, and, of course, the constant change in these media mean that complete mastery of a medium before it goes out of date is probably a fruitless goal.

In the field of education, we have come a long way from the days of using slates and ditto machines. Or have we? There are many things that technology can do in the classroom that many teachers either may not be aware of that may be mis-applied.

### Concern

In the two days at Maine, we saw examples of both technology under-use and technology over-use or mis-use. There were times when computer labs were seen being unused, or equipment was being used as glorified overheads. There seemed to be a strong use of the overhead document cameras known as ELMOs. Teachers would frequently put a document under the ELMO and project it on the big screen as a math problem would be worked out, or a map would be reviewed.

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*Students also expressed disappointment with the way blogging and wiki assignments were graded, with students sometimes not getting credit for a post, or feeling that no one was really reading their posts.*

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On the other end of the spectrum, students expressed that some teachers used new media to fulfill "busy-work" assignments. In fact, some students expressed such exhaustion with logging into the various platforms, that they wished their teachers would go back to using paper-pencil assignments. Students expressed being overwhelmed with all of the platforms teachers were using (Ning, Blogger, Wikispaces, QUIA, Moodle), and frustration with the fact that often the assignments forced them through a series of questions with a wrong answer (or a mis-type) ending

the homework attempt. Students also expressed disappointment with the way blogging and wiki assignments were graded, with students sometimes not getting credit for a post, or feeling that no one was really reading their posts.

In sum, while there seemed to be substantial technology resources in both buildings, and adequate support, there seemed to be a very uneven application of the technology across subject areas and grade levels.

#### Recommendations

- There should be a concentrated staff development process in place across all grade levels and subjects for the integration of technology and new media.
- Teachers spoke generally favorably about the “ITECH” process, but it seemed to us that this program only reached a small number of teachers and that it was perhaps perceived as elitist in that only the very advanced teachers, technologically, could apply to it or succeed within the program.
- There seemed to be a wide variety of opinions and desires expressed about technology, but the bottom line was that the uses of technology observed (from the small to the large) seemed to simply replicate a “worksheet” paradigm. That is to say, there didn’t seem to be many examples of teachers using the new media in new ways. (There was one teacher observed who was using Google docs to have her students collaborate on a text, but this kind of cutting edge application of new media was rarely seen in the two days of observation.)
- The district might want to invest in subscriptions to NCTE’s Pathways for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies, which provides a wealth of “real-world” applications of technology. There are many other resources that could be suggested to help teachers integrate new media. Simply subscribing to several edublogs would provide teachers with many examples of how new media are transforming educational practices. Looking at examples of how teachers have used new media will probably inspire teachers to new heights. See, for example, Kist (2005) and Kress (2003). See also Appendix G for a list of useful resources.

#### **10. Articulation of Instruction**

Although individual dedicated, skilled teachers are crucial to a successful literacy program, schools that help students “beat the odds” (Langer, 2001) develop and continue to refine both curriculum and pedagogy so that they support continuous literacy growth. Respectful articulation between feeder schools and high schools is essential, as is vertical articulation within departments and horizontal articulation between departments. The final articulation piece is to establish regular dialogue with colleges and businesses so that K-12 preparation flows smoothly into expectations of higher education and employment.

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***Respectful articulation between feeder schools and high schools is essential, as is vertical articulation within departments and horizontal articulation between departments.***

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### Concerns

Many freshmen experience a sudden drop in grade point average accompanied by a great deal of stress as they adapt to a new learning environment. Time built into the schedule for teacher collaboration has not always been well spent. Sometimes collaborative planning time is used for other kinds of meetings or tasks. Opportunities for cross-disciplinary work within the Academy (West) and Integrated Literacy program (East) have been missed. Special education teachers, ESL teachers, and reading specialists have not always been encouraged to share their expertise with other faculty in consistently helpful ways.

Although some students in advanced classes are being well prepared for the rigors of college classrooms, many are not. Instead, they are coming to think of education as the ability to accumulate and recall information rather than as the ability to think independently and analytically about complex issues (Graff, 2003). Many of these students are successful in high school but will be at a disadvantage in college courses that expect them to listen to conceptually-organized lectures and read theoretically-driven texts. First generation college students, in particular, may find themselves floundering (Rose, 1989).

### Recommendations

- Both high schools should establish regular communication with feeder schools about literacy goals and literacy instruction. Individual departments should build literacy instruction into their curriculum goals for each grade level, so that literacy instruction becomes a recursive expectation for all student throughout their high school years. Department chairs can meet periodically in order to establish points of commonality that can be used to enhance student learning. Regular interdisciplinary planning time within each high school should be prioritized so that interdisciplinary teams for each grade level can collaborate to address reading and writing goals and instructional methods. Special Education teachers, ESL teachers, and reading specialists should be effectively integrated into these interdisciplinary teams, perhaps rotating among teams on a regular basis.

### **Summary**

An audit that focuses on literacy instruction across the curriculum invites recommendations for professional development initiatives that promote strong literacy practices. It is difficult, however, to separate literacy-related professional development from other connected initiatives, especially Response to Intervention (RTI), assessment, collaborative problem solving, inquiry-based instruction, and authentic discussion. In addition, effective literacy instruction connects with culturally responsive teaching, and can be supported by the teacher induction process and the teacher evaluation program. The following sample outline suggests an approach to connecting the many related strands of a strong literacy program.

### Staff Development

We recommend that instructional leaders plan a one- to two-year calendar of staff development activities. The activities should connect under an over-arching theme, and the theme should appear obvious and significant for the staff. At least three sources of needs assessment should inform the development of a multi-year focus for staff development: (1) the obligations that schools have to meet the requirements of new legislation, (2) the expressed needs of staff, and (3) the needs observed by instructional leaders.

Before the current school year ends, it would be useful to survey staff about their perceived needs for professional development. One format for such a survey would be to construct sets of statements connected to the factors that Marzano (2003) associates with effective schools. This would provide a research-based framework for the items in the survey. The survey could also include open-ended prompts to allow staff to express their perceived needs. Including all staff in the process of identifying needs fosters buy-in, when the expressed rationale for beginning an initiative ties directly to the needs assessment.

Of course, any needs assessment data must pass through the filters that specify what the law requires schools to do and what the Board of Education expresses as the goals for the district. During the summer of 2009, it would be worthwhile for a team of instructional leaders to meet to study the needs assessment data and lay out a staff development plan for at least the next year. The staff development calendar would specify the focus and activities for each scheduled staff development day, such as institutes and school improvement days, and would connect other staff development opportunities, such as collaborative meeting time and optional workshops.

### Response to Intervention

Providing staff with a deep understanding of the Response to Intervention model is an obvious area of emphasis for professional development, because schools are required to implement a plan for the 2010-2011 school year. In addition, the model provides the broad structure for promoting a strong program of literacy instruction. We judge that it is still possible before the end of the 2008-2009 school year to share with staff the elements of the RTI model and to discuss the various roles and obligations for teachers and other staff members under the model. Professional development activities during the 2009-2010 school year should extend the staff's understanding of RTI.

As a beginning point, the RTI model invites educators to strengthen the core curriculum (Tier I) in each instructional area. Our brief experience at Maine West and Maine East suggests to us that strengthening the core curriculum would involve the following actions:

- shift to an inquiry-based, constructivist approach to instruction
- organize coherent thematic or conceptual units of instruction around essential questions: e.g., “Why do people revolt against an established system of government?” or “How do revolutions begin and develop?” and NOT “What is

the story of the French Revolution?” See Smagorinsky (2007) for guidance in constructing conceptual units.

- express outcome expectations that emphasize synthesis, analysis, and critical assessment
- shift classroom discourse away from *recitation* and toward *authentic discussion*
- design learning activities that emphasize cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and small group instruction
- align criteria in the teacher evaluation program to honor the emphasis on *inquiry* and *authentic discussion*.

An essential element in the RTI model is a well-development assessment system. As outside observers, we may not be aware of the wealth of assessments that serve literacy instruction in the Maine schools, but the implementation of RTI would require the following components:

- universal screeners
- common formative assessments
- progress monitoring tools
- professional development to promote assessment literacy

The RTI model relies on collaborative problem solving supported by access to a repertoire of instructional options. While certified staff already have collaborative time built into the school schedules, it does not appear that the collaborative meetings function as they would under RTI, and according to teachers’ testimonies, the meetings do not focus on efforts to refine the core curriculum and advance the learning of particular students. Another component of staff development for the 2009-2010 school year could focus on developing facility at team problem solving. While some training could begin in the summer of 2009, staff would benefit from ongoing professional development for several years. Collaborative meetings should support the following efforts:

- strengthen the core curriculum in each instructional area
- develop a continuum of interventions to provide instructional options for each teacher and each learner
- examine evidence of the effect of instruction
- study the progress of each learner and prescribe interventions as appropriate

#### Instructional Coaches

We understand that the district already has committed to employing instructional coaches. The concept of an *instructional coach* has become more commonplace in schools as the staff in schools work toward implementing a Response to Intervention model. Research literature often cites the use of *instructional coaches* as an effective approach to assuring ongoing professional development and support for teachers in using appropriate interventions to promote literacy [see, for example, Annenberg Institute (2009), Deussen, Coskie, Robinson & Autio (2007), and Knight (2007)]. We see merit in the following timeline:

- Spring/Summer 2009: hire instructional coaches
- Summer 2009: engage coaches in extensive training: orientation in staff development theme, practice in coaching strategies, recognition of district-wide approaches to literacy instruction, understanding of inquiry and authentic discussion, development of assessment literacy
- 2009-2010 school year: instructional coaches develop rapport with staff at each school, join collaborative meetings, visit and model in many classrooms, make connections with feeder schools
- Summer, 2010: instructional coaches contribute to literacy instruction training for new teachers
- 2010-2011 school year: expand coaching responsibilities, with many classroom visits and ongoing professional development, department by department

#### Professional Learning Communities

The Response to Intervention model is consistent with the concept of a professional learning community. Professional learning communities rely on collaborative problem solving, data-based decision making, the use of common assessments, reliance on a continuum of interventions, and an attitude of not accepting failure. Administrators and teachers throughout the district will have had exposure to the concept of professional learning communities already. The following steps might help in fostering a cohesive appreciation of professional learning communities:

- August 2009: Teams of instructional leaders attend the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) Conference in Lincolnshire.
- 2009-2010 school year: Begin to put into practice some of the components of a professional learning community: e.g., collaborative meetings focus on insuring students' success; departments identify the "essential outcomes" for specific courses, and begin to build a set of common assessments
- August 2010: Additional teams participate in the PLC Conference.
- 2010-2011 school year: Collaborative teams refine their practice of problem solving and continue to improve the core curriculum. Representatives from the high schools extend their articulation with the middle schools, connected to the examination of assessment results, staff development, and problem solving.

#### Culturally Responsive Teaching

Any plans for literacy instruction across the disciplines will need to attend to the delivery of instruction in a culturally responsive way. Our visits with teachers and students revealed to us that at both the West and East campuses, diversity is embraced as a strength. Freeman, Freeman, and Mercuri (2002, 2003) and Padron, Waxman, and Rivera (2002) report that strong academic programs for English language learners build on the relationships that teachers form with students. *Culturally responsive teaching* means that teachers know students: their academic knowledge, their individual traits, their talents, limitations, interests, and concerns. As a basic principle of learning, teachers need to connect new knowledge to what students already have stored in memory. Language minority learners find instruction especially appealing if it connects with their

lives, with their immediate concerns, and with the issues in their community. Teachers also need to be sensitive to the values within families, and the obligations that sometimes challenge academic work.

The process of getting to know students through informal and formal methods will help teachers to build rapport and will serve teachers to plan strategically for instruction. ELL students benefit from having opportunities to write and read about topics they value and know much about.

Language development is complex, and there are nuances of language proficiency. As part of a teacher's assessment of students' readiness for contending with a particular reading and writing tasks will be the recognition that the students' demonstrated proficiency in the social language of the halls and cafeteria does not mean mastery of the cognitive academic language proficiency that most academic literacy tasks demand.

#### New Teacher Training

We encourage the leaders in the district to continue their practice of including literacy instruction training as an element of new teacher induction for teachers in all disciplines. The training program should include attention to varying examples to represent specialized reading and writing in mathematics, science, and other technical areas. The planning for new teacher staff development early in the summer of 2009, should search for examples of specific reading strategies in a variety of subjects and should rely on the collaboration with practitioners who could model the processes of reading and writing instruction in their areas of expertise.



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## Appendix A

### The Auditors

Dr. Susan Callahan is an associate professor of English at Northern Illinois University, where she teaches advanced composition courses and courses in secondary English Education. She regularly teaches a methods course in the teaching of writing and another in the teaching of literature and works with both undergraduate and graduate students who are preparing to teach English. In addition, she provides graduate courses in teaching grammar, in assessment in the language arts, and in gender and the teaching of English. Her previous teaching experience includes secondary teaching in a variety of rural and urban settings in Battle Creek, Michigan and eight years working in the remedial program at Kentucky State University, a historically African American institution. She has participated in several high school-university partnerships and currently serves as a writing instruction consultant to the DeKalb School District. She served for three years as Chair of the Assessment Committee for the National Council of Teachers of English and has presented and published extensively in the area of portfolio assessment. Her work has appeared in *Research in the Teaching of English*, *Educational Assessment*, *Assessing Writing*, *The Educational Forum*, and *English Education*. She currently is working on a manuscript focusing on the role of reflective writing in learning.

Dr. William Kist is an associate professor at Kent State University, where he teaches literacy methods courses for pre-service teachers in the area of English Education in the Adolescence to Young Adult Education Program. He also teaches graduate students in the Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) program and in Curriculum & Instruction. He has been a middle school and high school language arts teacher for the Akron Public Schools; a language arts and social studies curriculum coordinator for the Medina County Schools' Educational Service Center and the Hudson City Schools; and a consultant and trainer for school districts across the United States, both independently and as a consultant for the National Council of Teachers of English. Dr. Kist has been active on the state and national levels as a literacy educator, founding and facilitating the Ohio Language Arts Supervisors' Network and serving on the Executive Board of the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (OCTELA). In November, 2007, Dr. Kist began a three-year term as Director of the Commission on Media for the National Council of Teachers of English. Dr. Kist's research interests focus on new literacies, broadening our conceptions of "literacy" to include alternative media such as video, blogging, and text messaging. On this topic, Dr. Kist has presented nationally and internationally. Dr. Kist has over 40 articles or book chapters to his credit, and his profiles of teachers is the focus of his book *New Literacies in Action* (2005) and his soon-to-be-released book from Corwin Press, (2009). Remaining active in video production work, Kist is the recipient of an Ohio Educational Broadcasting Network Commission (OEBIE) Honorable Mention for the documentary *The Learning Age* and a regional Emmy Award nomination for outstanding achievement in music composition for the documentary series *Our Family*. Kist has worked as a producer for the streaming video Project AdLit for the Ohio Resource Center for Mathematics, Science and Reading and is

the writer/director of an independent feature *Summer's Journey*, the result of a film collaboration that spans 17 years.

Dr. Thomas M. McCann serves as Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction for Elmhurst Community Unit School District, Elmhurst, Illinois. He has taught English in a variety of school settings, including eight years in an alternative school. He has published articles in *Educational Leadership*, *Research in the Teaching of English*, the *English Journal*, and *California English*. His books include *Explorations: Introductory Activities for Literature and Composition, 7-12* (National Council of Teachers of English, 1987), *In Case You Teach English: An Interactive Casebook for Preservice and Prospective Teachers* (Merrill/Prentice Hall, 2002), *Supporting Beginning English Teachers* (NCTE, 2005), and *Talking in Class* (NCTE, 2006). He edited and contributed a chapter to *Reflective Teaching, Reflective Learning* (Heinemann, 2005). The National Council of Teachers of English awarded him the Richard A. Meade Award for research about the concerns of beginning teachers. He also received the Paul and Kate Farmer Award from NCTE for his writing for the *English Journal*. He has taught for four high schools and for two colleges and three universities, where he worked with pre-service and practicing teachers in graduate education programs. He has supervised teachers in high school for twenty years. He served for fourteen years as English Department Chair at Community High School in West Chicago, Illinois, where he taught English and supervised other English teachers. He also served for three years as Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Instruction at Community High School. He also serves as an adjunct professor of English at Elmhurst College, in Elmhurst, Illinois.

## **Appendix B**

### **Teacher Interview Questions**

1. How do you define *literacy* or *literacy strategies*?
2. What literacy strategies do you explicitly teach your students?
3. How do you teach specific literacy strategies? Please provide examples of the strategies you teach and how you teach them.
4. How did you learn to teach literacy strategies?
5. To what extent do you see yourself differentiating your approach to literacy instruction for different groups of students?
6. How do you evaluate the effect that your literacy instruction has had on learners?
7. How useful has in-house professional development been in preparing you to teach literacy strategies?
8. What kind of support or direction have you received within your school to help you teach literacy strategies?
9. What resources do you need in order to do a good job of teaching literacy strategies?
10. What would you recommend that the school district or your colleagues need to do to have a significant impact on improving students' literacy strategies?



## **Appendix C**

### **Student Forum Questions**

1. In what ways have you become a better reader, writer, or speaker than you were at the beginning of the school year?
2. What do you do in your classes to help you become a better reader, writer, or speaker?
3. How did you know that your teacher was teaching a lesson to help you become a better reader, writer, or speaker?
4. What help do you think that teachers could provide you and other students to help you become better readers, writers, and speakers?
5. Why is it important to you that you become a more skillful reader, writer, and speaker?
6. How do you do most of your reading and writing outside of school (e.g., online, books, newspapers, letters, emails, blogs, Facebook, etc.)?
7. How often in school do you have occasions to read and write about topics that you care deeply about?

**Appendix D**  
**Framework for Observing Classes**

1. Identify the literacy experiences observed.
2. How was literacy instruction provided?
3. Characterize students' level of engagement in the literacy event or lesson.
4. What materials were used as the basis for the literacy activity?
5. What were the patterns of discourse you observed?
6. What evidence did you see that the teacher differentiated for the particular group of students and for individual students within the class?
7. How did the teacher monitor students' engagement and their understanding?

## **Appendix E**

### **Principles for Supporting Adolescents' Literacy Growth**

From Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement\*  
International Reading Association  
March 18, 1999

1. Adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read.
2. Adolescents deserve instruction that builds both the skill and desire to read increasingly complex materials.
3. Adolescents deserve assessment that shows them their strengths as well as their needs and that guides their teachers to design instruction that will help them grow as readers.
4. Adolescents deserve expert teachers who model and provide explicit instruction in reading comprehension and study strategies across the curriculum.
5. Adolescents deserve teachers who understand the complexities of individual adolescent readers, respect their differences, and respond to their characteristics.
6. Adolescents deserve homes, communities, and a nation that will support their efforts to achieve advanced levels of literacy and provide the support necessary for them to succeed.

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\*Commission on Adolescent Literacy (1999). *Adolescent literacy: A position statement*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. ([www.readingonline.org](http://www.readingonline.org))

## **Appendix F**

### **Standards for Literacy Learning**

See the following reports for more details on college readiness:

EPIC's "Redefining College Readiness"

[https://www.epiconline.org/files/pdf/Redefining\\_College\\_Readiness.pdf](https://www.epiconline.org/files/pdf/Redefining_College_Readiness.pdf)

Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

[http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/21st\\_century\\_skills\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/21st_century_skills_assessment.pdf)

See ACT College Readiness Standards

<http://www.act.org/standard/>

See 21<sup>st</sup> Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework (NCTE)

<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/21stcentframework>

#### Commonalities

- Stress the development of "habits of mind" that become part of lifelong learning
- De-emphasize the memorizing of facts
- Include learning in multimodalities

## **Appendix F, continued**

### **From Redefining College Readiness**

[https://www.epiconline.org/files/pdf/Redefining\\_College\\_Readiness.pdf](https://www.epiconline.org/files/pdf/Redefining_College_Readiness.pdf)

“The college-ready student . . . is able to:

- Understand what is expected in a college course
- Cope with the content knowledge that is presented
- Take away from the course the key intellectual lessons and dispositions
- Understand the culture and structure of postsecondary education and the ways of knowing and intellectual norms of this academic and social environment.

### Differences between college and high school courses

- College instructors pace their courses more rapidly
- College instructors emphasize different aspects of material taught with very different goals for their courses than do high school instructors.

### College instructors expect students to

- Make inferences
- Interpret results
- Analyze conflicting explanations of phenomena
- Support arguments with evidence
- Solve complex problems that have no obvious answer
- Reach conclusions
- Offer explanations
- Conduct research
- Engage in the give-and-take of ideas
- Think deeply about what they are being taught

## **Appendix F, continued**

- Write multiple papers in short periods of time.
- Write papers that are well reasoned, well organized, and well documented
- Work in small groups and with others inside and outside class on complex problems.

The key cognitive strategies are those shown to be closely related to college success.

- Intellectual openness
- Inquisitiveness
- Analysis
- Reasoning, argumentation, proof
- Interpretation
- Precision and accuracy
- Problem solving

## Overarching Academic Skills

- Writing
- Research

## Core Academic Subjects knowledge and Skills

English:

The knowledge and skills developed in entry-level English courses enable students to engage texts critically and create well written, organized, and supported work products in both oral and written formats. The foundations of English include reading comprehension and literature, writing and editing, information gathering, and analysis, critiques and connections. To be ready to succeed in such courses, students need to build vocabulary and word analysis skills, including roots and derivations. These are the building blocks of advanced literacy. Similarly, students need to utilize techniques such as strategic reading that will help them read and understand a wide range of non-fiction and technical texts. Knowing how to slow down to understand key point, when to re-read a passage, and how to underline key terms and concepts strategically so that only the most important points are highlighted are examples of strategies that aid comprehension and retention of key content.

## **Appendix F, continued**

### General Characteristics of College Readiness (p. 18)

1. Consistent intellectual growth and development over four years of high school resulting from the study of increasingly challenging, engaging, coherent academic content.
2. Deep understanding of a facility applying key foundational ideas and concepts from the core academic subjects.
3. A strong grounding in the knowledge base that underlies the key concepts of the core academic disciplines as evidenced by the ability to use the knowledge to solve novel problems within a subject area, and to demonstrate an understanding of how experts in the subject area think.
4. Facility with a range of key intellectual and cognitive skills and capabilities that can be broadly generalized as the ability to think.
5. Reading and writing skills and strategies sufficient to process the full range of textual materials commonly encountered in entry-level college courses, and to respond successfully to the written assignments commonly required in such courses.
6. Mastery of key concepts and ways of thinking found in one or more scientific disciplines sufficient to succeed in at least once introductory-level college course that could conceivably lead toward a major that requires additional scientific knowledge and expertise.
7. Comfort with a range of numeric concepts and principles sufficient to take at least one introductory level college course that could conceivably lead toward a major that requires additional proficiency in mathematics.
8. Ability to accept critical feedback including critiques of written work submitted or an argument presented in class.
9. Ability to assess objectively one's level of competence in a subject and to devise plans to complete course requirements in a timely fashion and with a high degree of quality.
10. Ability to study independently and with a study group on a complex assignment requiring extensive out-of-class preparation that extends over a reasonably long period of time.
11. Ability to interact successfully with a wide range of faculty, staff, and students, including among them many who come from different backgrounds and hold points of view different from the student's.
12. Understanding of the values and norms of colleges, and within them, disciplinary subjects as the organizing structures for intellectual communities that pursue common understandings and fundamental explanations of natural phenomena and key aspects of the human condition.

## **Appendix F, continued**

### **Effective Summative Assessment of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills**

From the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

“A Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills e-paper

#### Characteristics of Effective Summative Assessment of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

- Focus on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and content  
(In addition to the standard core subjects, important areas of study such as global awareness, civic literacy, etc., and skills, such as ICT literacy, critical thinking, problem-solving, and life skills.)
- Provide useful information about student achievement by measuring the comprehension, absorption and application of higher-order concepts.
- Be valid
- Be reliable
- Be fair
- Be administered widely

#### Characteristics of Effective Formative Assessment of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

- Focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and content.
- Make thinking visible by revealing the kinds of conceptual strategies a student uses to solve a problem. (Complicated, multi-dimensional, real-world solutions rarely require mastery of a single, isolated skill or understanding of a single subject matter.)
- Be structured so that educators can identify the background knowledge a student used to solve each problem in real-time.
- Be largely performance-based and authentic, calling upon students to use 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.
- Generate data that can be used to directly inform instructional practices.
- Aim to build capacity—both teachers’ and students’.
- Be part of a comprehensive assessment continuum.
- Reflect an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.



## **Appendix G**

### **Technology Resources to Support Literacy Learning**

#### **NCTE's Pathways for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies**

<http://www.ncte.org/pathways/21stcentury>

#### **Sample Educational Blogs Written by Teachers/Educators**

Danah Boyd

<http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/>

Bud the Teacher

<http://budtheteacher.com/blog/>

Jan Chipchase

<http://www.janchipchase.com/>

Cory Doctorow

<http://craphound.com/>

Karl Fisch

<http://thefischbowl.blogspot.com/>

Clarence Fisher

<http://remoteaccess.typepad.com/>

Wesley Fryer

<http://www.speedofcreativity.org/>

Chris Lehman

<http://www.practicaltheory.org/serendipity/>

Scott McLeod

<http://www.dangerouslyirrelevant.org/>

NCTE Assembly of Media Arts

<http://ncte-ama.blogspot.com/>

NCTE InBox Blog

<http://ncteinbox.blogspot.com/>

Will Richardson

<http://weblogg-ed.com/>

## Appendix G, continued

Dean Shareski

<http://ideasandthoughts.org/>

### Sample blogs that house student reflections and/or notes

Ninth Grade English

<http://smith9h0708.blogspot.com/>

Algebra class

<http://alg1e.blogspot.com/>

1. There are many books available that could serve as book club selections for a study group interested in focusing on this issue.

Some of them include:

Baron, N. (2008). *Always on: Language in an online and mobile world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crystal, D. (2008). *Txtng: The gr8 db8*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gee, J. P. (2003). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Johnson, S. (2005). *Everything bad is good for you: How today's popular culture is actually making us smarter*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Kist, W. (2005) *New literacies in action: Teaching and learning in multiple media*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. London: Routledge.

2. There are probably schools in the Chicago area that could be visited that use technology in exemplary ways. One suggestion would be to get in touch with the George Lucas Foundation's Edutopia (<http://www.edutopia.org/>) which could probably steer Maine teachers towards several model schools in the Chicago area to visit.

## **Appendix H**

### **Online Resources for Response to Intervention**

#### Overview

The following site offers a report on the Response to Intervention Model from the point of view of the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities:

[www.nrcld.org/rti\\_manual](http://www.nrcld.org/rti_manual)

#### Research and Articles

The following sites provide access to research and articles related to the background for moving to a Response to Intervention model:

<http://www.rti4success.org/>

<http://www.rtinetwork.org/>

#### Local Resource

The following link offers the view of Response to Intervention from Illinois ASPIRE (Alliance for School-based Problem Solving and Intervention Resources in Education). The menus for “Links” and “Parent Resources” provide access to an abundance of information about RTI.

<http://www.illinoisaspire.org>

#### Interventions for Struggling Readers

The Florida Center for Reading Research offers examples of specific interventions for struggling readers.

<http://www.fcrr.org/>

#### Learning More About RTI

The University of South Florida’s Problem Solving and Response to Intervention site offers several resources (under the “Resources” menu), including workshop handouts and presentation files. These resources can help in coming to a deeper understanding about RTI and in seeing how schools implement the model.

<http://floridarti.usf.edu/index.html>